**A person speaking into a microphone

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**

**VAST President/CEO/Executive Director Valerie James**

Valerie James is a 13-year Army veteran with one combat tour to Afghanistan.

Valerie’s first tour of duty was as a Lead Behavioral Specialist on a psychiatric unit. Her duties were the supervision of a 42-bed inpatient psychiatric unit. After leaving the military Valerie suffered two bouts of homelessness due to undiagnosed extreme anxiety. The first bout of homelessness was treated with the cookie cutter, just house her, she will be fine. The second bout of homelessness occurred in Texas and this time Valerie was housed in a transitional housing at US VETS, where she received mental health assistance for her anxiety. Valerie’s mental health improved to the point where she was able to return to the military for 4 more years and deployed to Afghanistan.

After exiting the military for the second time in 2011, Valerie was hired by US VETS, the organization that took her off the streets, as a Case Manager. In this role Valerie served close to 500 veterans at the US Veteran Campus where Valerie worked for 6-years. After arranging for the Houston Food Bank truck to feed over 300 residents once a month, arranging to have Baker Ripley pay the arrears of 179 veterans about to be evicted 5 months in a row. Helping to transition veterans from the street and incarceration into the US VETS transitional housing, just as US VETS had done for her. Valerie also Arranged for Lonestar Legal to open a free monthly legal clinic, assisting close to 47 veterans in expunging the records or at least lessening the offences. US VETS was so impressed with Valerie’s work, her title went from Case Manager to Community Liaison.

After leaving US Veterans, Valerie achieved her bachelor’s in psychology from the University of Houston Downtown. Valerie then worked at Mental Health of America Greater Houston for 6-years as the Veteran Peer Services Coordinator for Harris County, where her duties were raising teams of volunteer mentors to work in the jails, and the community to get veterans, mental and substance abuse assistance. After years of lived and work experience, achieving mental wellness, an education, Valerie started the non-profit of Veteran Advocates Services & Training (VAST).

The mission of VAST is to assist clients whose mental or emotional health has left them homeless or encounters with the law up until incarceration. VAST goes into the Harris County Jail twice a week to mentor the over 100 Veterans incarcerated there. Valerie and VAST has become the first call of anyone who knows of a veteran in need.